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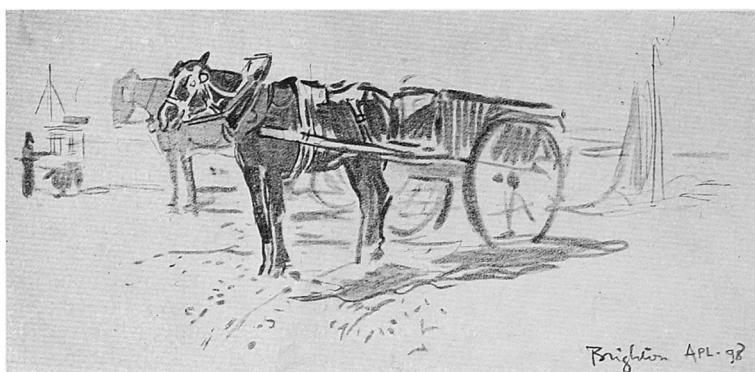
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BRIGHTON BEACH—Chalk Sketch
By Phil May

ENGLAND'S THREE GREATEST ARTIST-HUMORISTS SINCE HOGARTH

Shortly after the death of Phil May, last August, the enterprise of London art dealers gave occasion for a comparison of the work of England's three greatest artist-humorists since the days of Hogarth. An exhibition of May's drawings at the Leicester Gallery followed fast upon his death, as was to be expected, for he was one of the rare few whose work was not only appreciated by artists, but was also popular with the general public. At the same time a display was made in an adjoining room of the same gallery of work by Thomas Rowlandson, and a few blocks away, at the Dutch Gallery, a collection of drawings by Charles Keene was shown. It would be strange if these simultaneous exhibitions did not provoke something of a comparison of the work of the three pictorial humorists; and the review followed from the pen of an anonymous art writer. The fairness of the critic to his subjects and the correctness of his judgments merit a wider currency than his article had at the time, and I retell his story to the readers of BRUSH AND PENCIL—very largely in his own words—regretting that I cannot give more specific credit both to the writer and his journal, a course I should very much prefer. The collection of May's work was made up chiefly of his more

recent drawings for *Punch* and for the last number of his own Annual. His work, to the end, in the opinion of the reviewer, retained many of its distinctive qualities—its expressive line, its amazing economy of means, its feeling for character. But it must

be confessed that something had gone from it since the days when the "Parson and the Painter" took all the world that cares for good drawing by storm. He never did anything finer; perhaps he never did anything again quite so fine. There are not many illustrators who have been able to withstand the numbing influence of *Punch*; and Phil May was not, like Charles Keene, the exception. Certainly, whatever the cause, after he went on the staff of that paper his drawings seemed to lose their old spontaneity and freshness, their old irrepressible gayety—even, in a measure, their old mastery of the decorative value of well-balanced spaces of black and white. But, for all that, there is no one in England now who can compare with him as a humorous draftsman, no one who could show such an accomplished series of designs.

Sketches also were included—studies of figures and costumes, mostly in pencil, and less characteristic of his work as it is known to the public. Some were excellent, preserving all the old direct-

CRAYON SKETCH OF A CHILD
By Phil May

ness, and adding the tone and color which, of course, he never strove for in his pen-drawings. Others had just as well not have been exhibited. It has become the fashion to parade as masterpieces the studies of a little group of students before they have even produced or exhibited finished work, but Phil May was too great an artist for



such devices to be resorted to in his behalf. He might have waited, as Charles Keene waited. Keene's sketches were long to be had, even after his death, for a few shillings each, and are beginning only now to be valued by collectors, prized though they have ever been by artists.

There was also in the May exhibition a series of portraits of prominent politicians: Balfour, Chamberlain, and the rest, drawn as a rule in pen-and-ink with flat washes of color; almost Phil May's

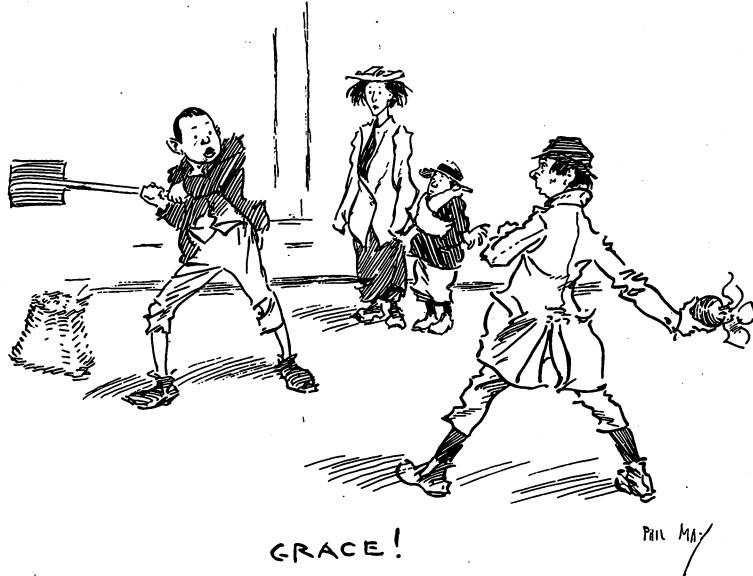


ILLUSTRATION
By Phil May

very last work, I believe. Their chief merit was negative. It is as if he had hesitated between a good portrait and an effective caricature, and obtained neither. Such color as he gets is at least never crude or offensive. Beyond this there is little to be said, and suggestive as it always is to see the first attempts in color of the distinguished artist who has hitherto confined himself to monochrome, in Phil May's case they only make one wish he had lived to carry his experiments further, or else that such tentative performances had not been exhibited.

The great interest of this show at the moment, however, lay, above all, in the fact of the Rowlandson and Keene exhibitions, so that an excellent opportunity was presented for a comparative study of the worth of the three great artist-humorists.

In one respect there is no question that the gain has been great, the development immensely for the better. Rowlandson was an artist no less than Keene and Phil May. I may not go as far as M. Huysmans, who, according to a quotation making the rounds of the press—which I do not remember, and have not yet been able to



ILLUSTRATION FOR "THE GOOD FIGHT"
By Charles Keene

trace—was ready to put aside Gavarni and the Devérias, and I hardly know whom else, in favor of Rowlandson. But neither can I deny that Rowlandson was an admirable artist when he left humor severely alone. I have seen drawings of women by him as graceful as any study by Reynolds or Gainsborough could be, and some of his little landscapes are full of charm.

He understood economy of means as well as Phil May, though naturally his methods for the reproduction of his day were entirely

different. But his line was as direct and expressive, and his color was obtained as simply by flat washes, and yet none of his contemporaries, not even Gainsborough, could express the character and beauty of a landscape with more intense truth and sympathy. When it came to humor, however, it was another thing. To be sure, he is remembered now as the great humorist, but I would cheerfully sacrifice all his caricatures and satires for one of his little landscapes or studies of figures. Some of his most famous designs were in the collection at the Leicester Gallery—designs like the "Dressing for the Masquerade" and the "Fencing at Angelo's," but they only confirmed me in my estimate of him as humorist.

Hogarth could see and express humor without stooping to exaggeration and gross caricature, but Rowlandson did not know how to be funny without exaggerating; his one idea of character was caricature, his one idea of fun was farce. When he would ridicule the vices and manners of his time, he fell into a corresponding grossness. His drawings



PEN-DRAWING
By Charles Keene

abound in as vulgar and revolting passages as the writings of Smollett. This is the more irritating because he was, in his way, a greater genius than Smollett, and his genius should have saved him from follies and excesses that have not even the redeeming virtue of being strong and deadly as satire. His laughter was indulgent—he laughed not to kill, but to amuse.

With Keene the grossness disappears wholly. He was as refined in his attitude toward the types he drew—not always refined in

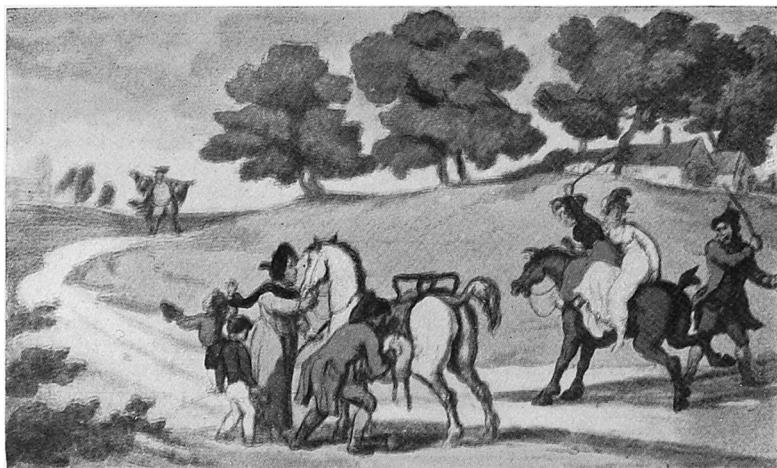


HUNTING THE SLIPPER
By Thomas Rowlandson

themselves—as in his technical methods. He had a far keener eye for character than Rowlandson, and it saved him from seeing only caricature. Character, for him, had always beauty. He found it in what are usually called vulgar types, the coster and the cabby, the policeman and the waiter, the slavey, and above all, the drunken man—just as Rembrandt found it in the Jews of Amsterdam, Velasquez in the dwarfs in the Spanish court, Hals in the jester and the fishwife. He had, too, a respect for character or beauty. He rendered it with a truth, a realism, that is beautiful in itself, not with the silly absurdity of the designer of comic valentines. And because these types were humorous as they lived, so they were humorous in his drawings.

At one time it was the fashion to deny all humor to Keene because he did not invent his jokes. It was the sort of criticism to be expected in a country where, in an illustration as in a picture, nothing counts but the story. I have seen people go through an exhibition of Keene's, reading scrupulously every jest entered in the catalogue, roaring at each in turn with never a glance at the drawings on the wall, and enjoying it all enormously. But really it made no difference who invented Keene's jokes. His drawings would be as amusing had no legend ever been printed beneath.

People used to say he chose them because he was incapable of seeing beauty in graceful form or refined features—he could not draw a beautiful woman, "a lady," they said. There were drawings of



THE VICAR'S FAMILY ON THE WAY TO CHURCH
By Thomas Rowlandson

women in the collection at the Dutch Gallery that gave the lie to this criticism. It was only that strong character interested him more. And not only was he a greater humorist, he was a greater draftsman than Rowlandson, even a greater master of line and simple means. The exhibition was especially interesting, sharing, as it did, many of his preliminary sketches and studies with the finished designs and the engravings.

He belonged to a school of illustrators who believed that as much care and thought and study should go to the making of the smallest drawing as to the painting of the biggest picture. To him an illustration was not something to be knocked off in an odd moment—a useful pot-boiler—but a work of art, great or not according to the seriousness with which the artist devoted his talent or genius to it. There were numerous instances of this seriousness; not one, perhaps, demonstrating better what I mean than the elaborate study for one of his drunken men (the sort of subject the public probably thought he dashed off anyhow), where not only is the composition carefully sketched in, but a detailed note of the hands of the principal figure is still more carefully made on the margin.

These sketches are always freer in handling than the drawings; Keene not having worked year after year for the wood-engraver in vain. He learned quickly what was best not to do if he did not wish the veriest travesty of the original design to appear on the printed page; and he was artist enough to retain, despite those restrictions, an effect of freedom that was the distinction of his work in the midst

of the drawings of Du Maurier, Tenniel, Sambourne, and the others, who each had worked out a formula more or less mechanical to lighten his own and the wood-engraver's task. Still, when Keene's studies are seen with the finished designs and these with the engravings, it is realized how much was lost before his work reached the public.

Here, certainly, Phil May had the advantage. It was easier to work for "process," once its possibilities were grasped, and May recognized from the start what it could do, and what it could not. His friends now are beginning to say that too much has been made of the influence which the new mechanical processes and rapid printing had in forming his style. This is absurd; for it is really altogether to his credit that he should have been artist enough to know how to adapt his methods to the technical requirements of his art. His work loses far less in the reproduction than Keene's. As for the actual drawing, I do not think it ever quite equaled the refinement of Keene's. Besides, Keene had a sense of design, an appreciation for the essential part every detail played in the composition, that May did not even endeavor to rival.

You can always see that his backgrounds, when there are any, were carefully studied, but he expressed them by shorthand; and in most cases the figures would be as effective and eloquent without them. Keene also used shorthand, but within broader limits. The effect of his figures often depends upon their relation to the land-



A CONNOISSEUR
By Thomas Rowlandson

scape—the marvelous stretches of moorland or the simple cabbage patch—to the London or village street, to the room as full of character as the people. In his humor, too, May is less refined; his fun, like Rowlandson's, verging upon farce, his character lost in caricature, when seen side by side with Keene's—though he is never vulgar, never gross, never childish, as Rowlandson was only too often.

However, the great merit of both Charles Keene and Phil May is that each, after his own fashion, could combine fine drawing with genuine humor. That is where they differ so utterly from almost all other would-be humorous draftsmen in their own country since Hogarth. Some may have been artists—Rowlandson for one, as I have said—but then their sense of humor was primitive and naïve to the last degree. Unfortunately, the very primitiveness, the very naïveté, has always appealed to the great British public, with its sneaking fancy for the amateur in art.

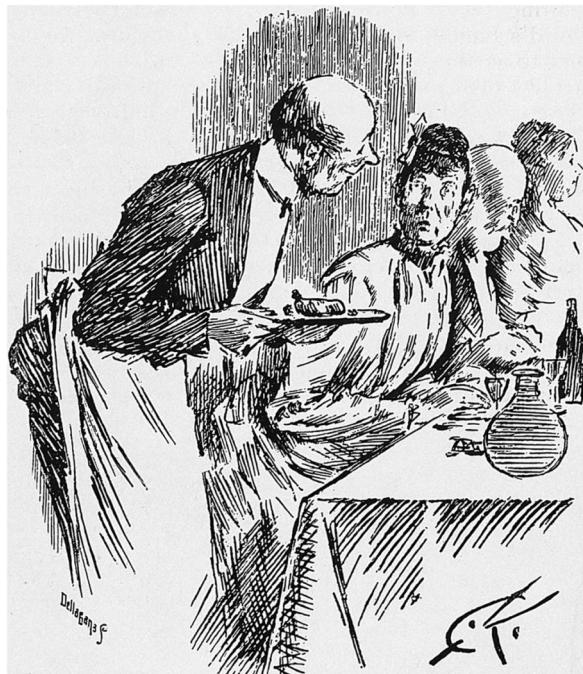
Let a man but try to do what it is not his business to do, and even if he fail in the endeavor, your honest Briton will applaud to the echo. For example, when the County Council band plays in the garden below my windows on summer evenings, the musicians have only to stop blowing their horns, which is their special business there, and begin singing without voices, or crowing like cocks, to drive their audience wild with delight—until I often think if they would drop their instruments altogether, and walk round the garden on their hands, their success might well make even Sarasate or Kubelik



THE VICAR IN COMPANY WITH STROLLING PLAYERS
By Thomas Rowlandson

wonder. So it is with art. I do not suppose any artist of note was, for awhile, more paragraphed than the policeman of Leeds (or Bradford), who had the landscapes he painted in his leisure moments rejectd at the academy. A picture that presents any optical delusion—for instance, a Christ with eyes that open and close—will draw the town.

J. C.



PEN-DRAWING
By Charles Keene

ST. LOUIS'S FRIEZE OF FAME

A somewhat notable idea has been carried out in the World's Fair at St. Louis in the plan and construction of the Art Palace, a building in classic style, the work of the well-known architect, Cass Gilbert. He conceived the idea of enriching the upper portion of the walls of the permanent part of this million-dollar art palace by a broad sub-frieze consisting of panels and medallions, in the latter of which are served in relief the portraits of famous artists of ancient

and modern times. These medallions are in limestone, the same material of which the permanent part of the Art Palace is constructed.

The sculptors are George T. Brewster and Ottildo Piccirilli, both of New York. Of course the countenances of many of the great artists so portrayed are familiar, yet the series as a whole will do much to preserve the remembrance of the work of these men for all time, as this beautiful Palace of Art will be visited not only by millions during the periods of the World's Fair, but by generations to come, for it is constructed to last at least until one or two centuries have passed since the consummation of the Louisiana Purchase.

The full list of the twenty-two men included in these panels of fame is as follows: Phidias, Ictinus, Botticelli, Giotto, Michael Angelo, Raphael, Palladio, Leonardo da Vinci, Brunelleschi, Donatello, Titian, Della Robbia, Bramante, Durer, Holbein, Rembrandt, Rubens, Velasquez, Cellini, Richard M. Hunt, Augustus St. Gaudens, and John La Farge.

There were great artists before Phidias, but it is to him that our own generation looks back for its inspiration, as though he were, indeed, the fountain-head of all artistic endeavor. Perhaps most of us have almost as reverential a feeling in an artistic sense for Michael Angelo and for Raphael as for the greatest of the sculptors of ancient Greece. Both of these men of genius of the Renaissance era, however, drew their inspiration largely from Greek sources, though their works were also expressive of the ideas of their own time.

In art, as in everything else, each one has his own favorite. To one person this or that great master of the past seems pre-eminently great, while to another a genius of some different name stands higher



ILLUSTRATION

By Phil May

in the scale of greatness. We cannot all like the same things in art, any more than in ordinary products—a very wise provision of nature. It would be a difficult task to make a list of twenty-two of the great men in the art world of the present and past which should be accepted as correct by every individual. But it seems to be the opinion that those who chose the twenty-two that should be so honored in the decoration of the Art Palace at St. Louis have, on the whole, chosen well.

Perhaps the most comment will be occasioned by the choice of the late Richard N. Hunt, architect; Augustus St. Gaudens, sculptor; and John La Farge, painter, representing modern art in these decorations. It is always hard for those of our own generation to judge of a man who stands high in public estimation, and to decide whether in his field of work he excels all others of the same guild. Certainly the genius of St. Gaudens and La Farge is sufficient to entitle them to the highest honor.

C. E. LAWTON.



WHITECHAPEL: SATURDAY MORNING
By Phil May